

LaTour de Geffrye

Saturday, 25th of July, 2009

The Geffrye Museum, Hackney

Sami Akram, Charlotte Cole,
Matilda Ibini and Savannah John



1. [Sami, dressed in top hat and suit meets the audience outside the Geffrye Museum, by the Statue of Geffrye.]

[Sami]

“Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen, my name is Sami. I will be acting as your guide today. It is my great pleasure to take you on the LaTour de Geffrye. We’ve called it the Tour de Geffrye because the Geffrye Museum has a French link, but I’m not going to spill the beans about it –you’ll simply have to wait and see.

I hope you enjoy our tour –we’ve got a few surprises coming your way.

This is a statue of Robert Geffrye, he was the founder of the Almshouses, which were built in 1714.

Nice to meet you, Robert [*Sami takes off Top Hat and bows*].

Now I’d like you to follow me [*Sami leads Group to end of first Air Raid Shelter outline. They stop.*]

“Now Ladies and Gentleman, I’d like you to think for a moment what you’re standing on. [*Pause –say 10 seconds*]
“There’s another one over there, why don’t we go over and see it. [*They walk over and stop by the second outline*]

“Would anyone like to have a guess what we’re standing on?

[*Sami waits: if an audience member knows, and tells, Sami replies*]: “Well done” [*Sami tips his cap at the audience member*]

[*If audience don’t know the answer Sami says*]

“Are you sure nobody knows? Okay, I’ll tell you.
You’re standing on a world war two air raid shelter –it was filled in in 1945, but it’s still down there.



Let's move on to the Almshouses [*they follow Sami to the door of the Almshouses. Sami opens the door, the audience follow him into the ante-room*]

2. The Almshouses. Ground Floor Antechamber.

[Sami]

“The Almshouses were built in 1714. The people who lived in the Almshouses were pensioners; poor and they didn’t have many belongings.

I’d like six of you to follow me into the next room and six of you to go with Janine upstairs. The reason for this is Health and Safety –I know, I know, it’s not my fault: if it was up to me I’d let you touch everything, but you can’t -please don’t touch anything in the rooms, because they are original objects and they’re very valuable. Also there’s a step upstairs –don’t trip over it, because I’m not rich either.

[*Sami counts six audience members*] “1-2-3-4-5-6, follow me please and we’ll go and see someone who lives here.”

[*Sami leads the six members of audience into the downstairs room, they stand and listen to Savannah.*]



2a. Almshouse (Ground Floor)

[Sami asks audience members to stand in a horseshoe around Savannah, perhaps adding a reminder not to touch anything]

[Savannah improvises her impressions of the room]

[Sami]

“Now if you’re ready we’ll go upstairs. Watch the paintwork – it’ll stain your clothes if you touch it.

[After Savannah has finished Sami leads the group back into the anteroom where they wait for the upstairs group to finish and be led into the downstairs room. When they’ve passed, Sami leads his group upstairs.]

[Sami leads the group upstairs. When he’s at the top of the stairs he says] “Watch the step going into this room please. I’m not made of money.”

[Sami leads the group into the room]

2b. Almshouse. Upper Floor.

[Savannah improvises her impressions of the room]

[*After Savannah has finished Sami says*] “If you’d like to follow me now. And remember to watch your step on the way down.”

[*Sami leads the group downstairs and out through the exit onto the lawn.*



[*Sami leads the group back up the lawn to the auxiliary entrance. He tips his top hat at the door and it opens.*]

[*Sami*]

“This way please.”

[*Sami leads the group left into the Museum*]



[*Sami*]

“Now we’re in the Museum where you’ll find many fine living rooms laid out for you. My favourite is the 1990s apartment, back that way [*Sami points back to the Geffrye extension where the 1990s room is housed*] “But we haven’t come to see that today. Instead we’d like you to see the Chapel.

[*Sami leads the group through the Chapel and stops at the picture of the Old Lady. He stops and looks around. He says*]

“The Pensioners used to pray here, whether they liked it or not. They wore blue gowns paid for by the Geffrye Trust. [*Sami points at the picture of the Old Lady.*] This lady doesn’t look very happy. And in 1887 a Groundsman hanged himself, in here.

The Garden Reading Room we're going to now was only built in 1914 when the Geffrye opened as a Museum, after the last Pensioner had left."

[Sami leads the group to the Garden Reading Room]



3. Side entrance to the Garden Reading Room

[Sami] "Please can you stand with your backs to the window.

[Matilda reads Charlotte's first text, regarding the mural that decorates the inner, curved wall.]

[Matilda]

"You see that mural? That beautiful image that scales the curved wall? A picture that seems to belong in a Beatrix Potter story and yet it's here, surrounded by history,

whereas the mural shows imagination and a dream-like fantasy. Can you imagine being in that scene? Watching the boy on that incredibly long horse, and watching to see if the rabbit catches its fish. Can you imagine having small talk with the goose in clothes? I can.



I reckon we'd talk about countries, faraway countries where the sun is always burning and the food is fresh from the sea. We'd talk about the people and their culture, their way of life and the songs they'd sing. If I was there with her that's what I'd talk about.

If I was to carry on to the horse I'd walk barefoot on the grass because it looks so soft and lush. I'd look up to the sky because it's so clear with the rays of the sun turning my face gold.

When I'd reach the man on the horse I'd ask him about his life since he must have some truly inspiring stories about him

and his horse. Stories about all the other imaginary places behind that mural, of cities where people fly on birds and they sail on rivers on the backs of fish. Of islands where the true rulers of the kingdom are huge creatures, talking mice and frogs that rode on bikes. I wish that I could sit there with the kingfisher watching him tug at the fishing line and listen to him mutter about his family back in the hole in the forest. Of how his six children are all completely different, from Tommy who loves to paint to his youngest Talya who adored chewing the grass. He'd speak of his wife and how she cooks the best carrot soup he's ever tasted.

As the sun dips behind the hills and the taste of the carrot soup fades I'd go back the way I came, night overcoming the land at last. As the darkness swept over me like a tide of water I'd be pulled to the crypt, a lonely and desolate place. I'd stop at the door and try to peek through windows only to see darkness. I'd go through the giant archway, my heart suddenly a jar of trapped butterflies. I'd be treading into the night, a sense of death surrounding me, and look back to see the leaves of a tree curled back in fear."

[Matilda moves towards the end of the Garden Reading Room and turns into the Chapel]

[Matilda pauses, then begins her second text, regarding the Groundsman hanging himself in the Chapel in 1887. Matilda leads Sami into the Chapel. The audience follows.]

"I remember this one night I'd just returned from a quick walk in the garden, like I normally did every other night.

I was walking down these halls alone. It was so silent, so quiet, it seemed to me that when you heard the wind it was like a whisper in the air.

I came to a door and froze. There was this feeling, a sort-of-cold-feeling that made me stop at the door. I peeked round it and stared into the light. It was the Groundsman in the Chapel, standing alone and in the middle of the room, praying.



I stood there, behind the door and looked around the room. There was a rope and a stool. There was something wrong about the arrangement of objects. The rope hung high above the stool, which only a child could use as a seat, it was that small.

I eased open the door, only to make it creak. He never noticed. His lips continued to mutter the lonely prayer. I jumped at the chiming bell.

I stood there, eyes widening as he stood on the stool...”

[Matilda leads the audience into the Chapel and asks the group to form a circle round the stool in the centre of the Chapel.]

[When Matilda has finished arranging the audience she looks back to Savannah waiting in the corridor behind her and Savannah begins singing as she walks into the Chapel, ending up standing at the railings where she completes her hymn.]



4. Chapel

[When Savannah's hymn has ended, Sami says]

[Sami]

"Thank you. I think the Groundsman would have been proud to be remembered like that. Let's move on.

[Sami leads the audience out of the Chapel, and through the thin corridor of living rooms to the main entrance/exit. As he reaches the exit, Sami says]

[Sami]

"I hope you don't find this too gloomy, all this talk of the dead, but there's a few more bodies we've found here –not the actual bodies of course. Follow me.

[Sami leads the audience down the front lawn, towards the Kingsland Road. He turns right, and leads the audience past the graves of Robert Geffrye and his wife. He doffs his top hat at the graves. Sami says]

[Sami]

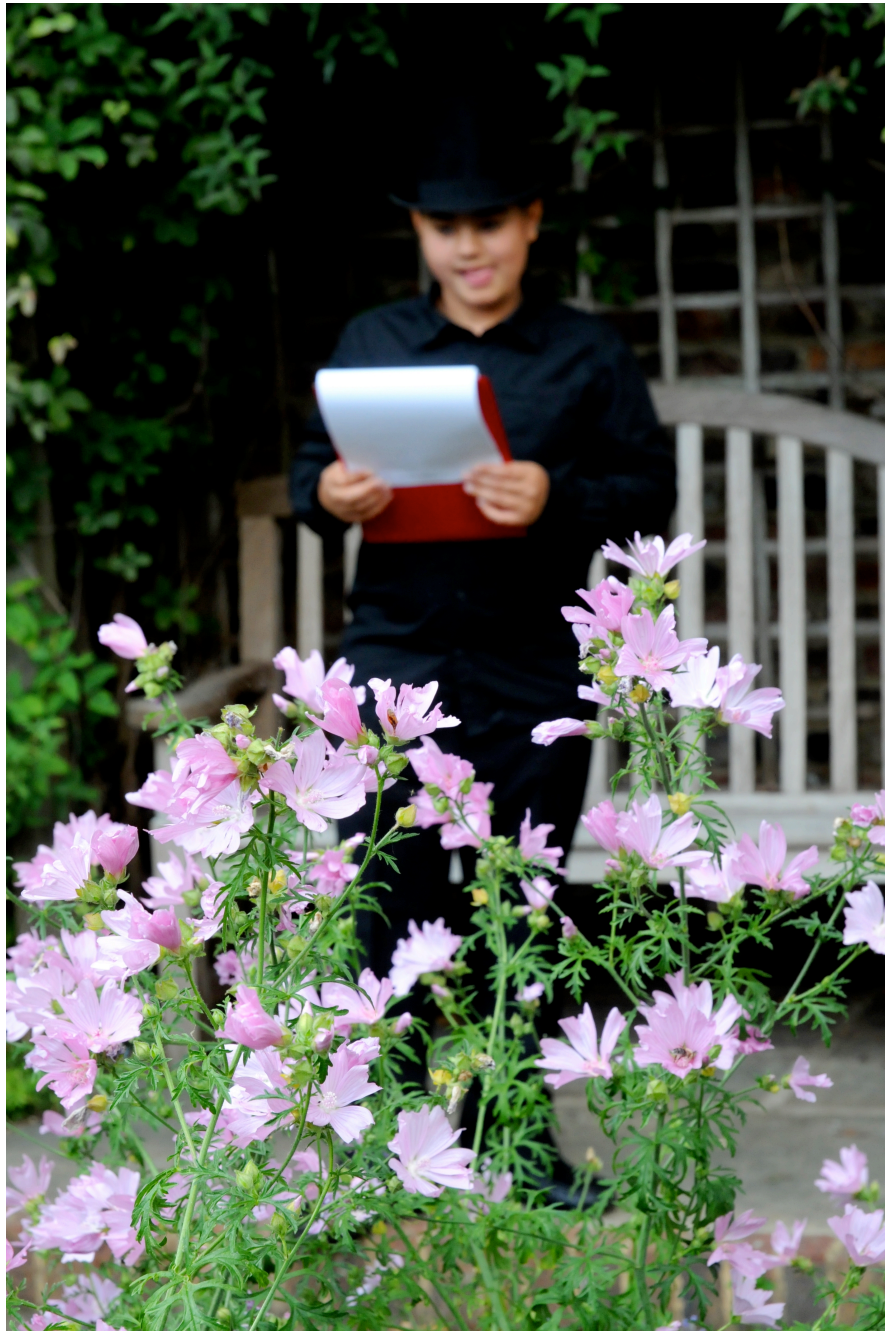
"Mr and Mrs Geffrye were the lucky ones –they have a grave so we can remember them. But about a hundred Pensioners who died at the Geffrye were buried in unmarked graves on the grounds. You could be standing on one right now. We don't know where they went, but they're here somewhere. Let's have a moment of silence for them."

[Sami removes his top hat to lead a moments' silence. When this has elapsed Sami puts his top hat back on.]

[*Sami*]

“Thank you. Now let’s return to the land of the living and finish our journey.”

[*Sami leads the audience to the Herb Garden.*]



6. Herb Garden

[Sami opens the door to the Herb Garden to let the audience in, and closes it quietly when they have all entered.]

[Matilda, standing in the centre of the Herb Garden by the small pewter fountain]

“You arrive here, running away from the crypt in the mural, in a small and delicate boat given to you by the kingfisher. The night has ended and, as the day breaks through the clouds, the flowers open to release their wonderful fragrance, the petals sharpen their vibrant colours and the plants entice you to try out their flavours.





You walk around to discover the smells of the nectar and leaves. You find one that reminds you of lemon sherbet. You imagine the juices of the sweet swirling around in your mouth and make it water.

You move on to the next selection of plants, only to find you used some of it in a new recipe you tried. You can remember the flavours from last night, the sweet, sour and the spiciness the herbs gave out.

You walk over to find an array of plants, used to create a beautiful range of colours for clothes, from a bright pink to deep orange.

This garden holds the secret to many things –you just have to look around to find them. It also holds the beginning of our Latour de Geffrye. See if you can find what gave us the idea.”

[Sami waits to see if the audience are exploring the Herb Garden. When he is satisfied they have finished he says]

[Sami]

“Thank you Matilda, and thank *you* [*indicates audience*] for coming. We’d like you to have a drink with us. It’s Lemon Verbena squash –alcohol-free if you please- and if you’d like the recipe you can ask Janine for it. We hoped you liked our tour.

[All members join at the end to pour drinks and talk with audience members.]

